



M O V I N G T H E
AMERICAN
ECONOMY

U.S. Department of Transportation
Office of Public Affairs
Washington, D.C.
www.dot.gov/affairs/briefing.htm

News

PHMSA 05-06
Thursday, July 20, 2006

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BP Exploration Directed to Complete Testing on North Slope Pipelines

The Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration (PHMSA) today directed BP Exploration (Alaska) Inc. to take additional measures to ensure safety on its Prudhoe Bay pipelines as a result of a pipeline failure in March 2006.

The agency's latest directive requires BP to submit a comprehensive engineering plan to safely and quickly drain 17,000 barrels of oil contained within the idled Western Operations Area pipeline, and requires completion of engineering plans to assure sediment within the pipelines is stored safely in tanks to avoid contamination and maintain the safety of the Trans Alaska Pipeline system. Additionally, BP must take samples from the pipeline walls, and photographs of pipeline solids of the Eastern Operations pipeline to determine whether the pipeline is ready for an internal "smart pig".

Immediately after the failure of BP's Prudhoe Bay Western Operations Area 34-inch low-pressure pipeline, PHMSA issued an order directing "smart pigging".

PHMSA Administrator Tom Barrett and acting Chief Safety Officer Stacey Gerard visited Alaska earlier this month to review North Slope pipeline operations, meet with federal and state officials, and ensure completion of the corrective actions required by PHMSA's original order.

"These additional corrective actions are needed to assure the safety of the pipeline operations," said PHMSA Administrator Barrett. "BP's operations must reflect suitable and stringent operational controls."

PHMSA is coordinating its actions with the federal-state Joint Pipeline Office and with numerous federal and state agencies that oversee the safety on the North Slope of Alaska.

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